

ANOTHER NAME FOR EVERY THING

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 2, Episode 4

Non-Duality in Relationships,
Community, and Religion (Part 1)

Brie Stoner: Welcome to season two of Another Name for Every Thing, casual conversations with Richard Rohr, responding to listener questions from his new book The Universal Christ and season one of this podcast.

Paul Swanson: As mentioned previously, this podcast was recorded on the grounds of the Center for Action and Contemplation and may contain the quirky sounds of our neighborhood and setting. We are your hosts. I'm Paul Swanson.

Brie Stoner: And I'm Brie Stoner.

Paul Swanson: We're staff members of the Center for Action and Contemplation and students of this contemplative path, trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition amidst high fiving our partners after putting the kids down, missed phone calls, and the shifting state of our world.

Brie Stoner: This is the fourth of twelve weekly episodes. Today, we're addressing your questions on the theme of non-duality, including and transcending in relationships, community, and religion. We split this theme into two episodes, and this is part one of that conversation.

Brie Stoner: So, Richard, this phrase that you've been using both in the last season as well as in this season, "include and transcend," is so helpful because it orients us to maybe a right relationship and ordering of how to live in a more non-dual way, that we have to include, that there's an inclusionary first step in order to transcend former containers or unhelpful ideologies.

So, we had a lot of people ask questions about, how do we do that in relationship? How do we do that in community? What does including and transcending look like in the very practical every day zooming in to decisions, to choices, to conversations? So, this first question is from Lou Ana from British Columbia in Canada:

Through each episode of the podcast, but particularly as it was wrapping up, I've been wondering how do I continue my journey while showing kindness to my elderly parents? They are a semi-retired pastoral couple, whose own very dual evangelicalism has been and become more extreme. They're in their late 80s. It's exhausting to be talked to about biblical principles over and over. It's very formulaic and morally based and now they're doing it to our kids, and it's because we raised our kids as a part of a house church. How does one deal with family who out of fear of hell, feel the need to confront and witness at every opportunity? Is there an appropriate way in which to set up strong boundaries? My evangelical baggage then asks, is that even Christ-like to have boundaries? To quote my teenagers, 'I just can't even,' because I'm exhausted. I would love to hear your thoughts.

Richard Rohr: Wow, this is subtle. It demands, wisdom, wisdom. I'm glad I'm Lou Ana has come to the word boundaries, because that's the heart of the matter. I'm going to get philosophical for a minute, allow me. First, you have to clarify "distinction." Like we say, the father is the Father, the Father is not the Son, but the Father is one with the Son by infinite love, all right? But it starts with the clarifying of boundaries before you overcome those boundaries with love. Now, what she's giving a wonderful example of, is that some time we have to return to those boundaries for the sake of truth. Now, I don't mean truth speaking is always got to be cruel or hard, particularly if I'm the parent of some children, and they're being put in a situation

where I know they're going to be given some unhealthy, dualistic, punitive, angry, fear-based—use whatever word you want—I think it's entirely appropriate to restate boundaries.

Now, how do you do that with your own parents without creating very hurt feelings and even a family argument? You're going to have to find the language. I don't know what language will work in your family, speaking to Lou Ana, but that you recognize, it's not your place to create a dilemma for your kids. To have you saying one thing at home, completely contradicted by grandma on Sunday, all you're doing is creating more complexity for your kids in a very complex world. If your relationship allows you in their late eighties, usually you move toward non-duality naturally, but a lot of evangelicals don't because they took such pride in their dualistic thinking, they don't realize that. They formed their identity out of strict dualistic thinking. So, can you imagine letting go of that is letting go of the self. I'm not trying to judge her grandparents, but she's already seeing the problem. Is there a way?

Brie Stoner: I think for me—

Richard Rohr: Go ahead, please, give me your answer. You have children, I don't.

Brie Stoner: I've been in a similar situation where I had family members like my grandparents who have a very different belief system than I do and adhere to a more conservative background, or they did. And one of the things that I found as the happy medium was to say, "Can you trust God with me? Can you entrust me to God?" Therefore, "I don't need you to preach at me every time you see me," or "I don't need you to— Can you just take that concern, which I know is based out of love, take it to God, pray for me, pray for me all day long."

Richard Rohr: Yes, that they can understand.

Brie Stoner: Right. "But when you feel the impulse to talk to me about my, my own beliefs, can I just ask you to entrust me to God in that moment and to not"—

Richard Rohr: That's beautiful. But you had such a conversation?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. And I have to say, I don't know that it's possible to have these kinds of conversations without hurt feelings because it is difficult to trust. And I do think that these things are motivated out of love and concern.

Richard Rohr: Sure. Did you use the language, they would understand?

Brie Stoner: I tried to.

Richard Rohr: Prayer and trust God. Go ahead, Paul.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I come from a similar background in a lot of ways, and I think there's an element of self-care that one needs to note, too, if I do want to engage in these kinds of dialogues, can I do that in a way where I'm not just being trounced on or the power dynamics of family to be able to say, "We've talked about this for a while. Let's take a break. Maybe we can come back and talk to it, five years from now," or something—

Brie Stoner: Or never.

Paul Swanson: --but in a way that that helps give you a sense of your own empowerment of like, “This is where I stand, and I’m not trying to belittle your beliefs and your standards of being in the world, but I also need you to at least hear this. And then if we can’t respect these rules, then we shouldn’t keep that door too wide open. Maybe we can try again once we all have settled back into our corners not in an antagonistic way, but--” Because I think boundaries get encroached like that and then all of a sudden there’s enmeshment, and hurt feelings, and then it just takes on a life of its own versus being able to like hold one another in that love.

Brie Stoner: Well, that’s family though, isn’t it, enmeshment and confusing boundaries. And you were mentioning in the last episode how the impetus of “I ought to,” or “I should,” I think that plays a part in this, because we all feel somewhat guilty that we do have a need for boundaries maybe, or that—

Richard Rohr: Yeah, we do.

Brie Stoner: --that there is some differentiation that needs to happen. I even think about the fact that that side of my family would have these weekly gatherings every Sunday. Since I lived in the States, we would go to this weekly gathering, and there were aspects of it that were so beautiful and amazing, like look at this family gathering weekly, but there were also a lot of really toxic conversations that after a while I realized, “I don’t think I can go every Sunday. I can’t keep doing this to myself.” I actually left depleted, exhausted, feeling like I had to argue for myself.

So, I don’t know. Richard, would you speak to that part of us that wants to honor our parents, or our loved ones, our family members? I think some of us maybe feel torn with the desire to want to honor our elders and also find our own healthy middle ground place.

Richard Rohr: My words are going to be weak, because I’ve never had to deal with it. I’ve always had parents, my grandparents were dead, but parents who thought like I did, because they listened to my tapes—

Brie Stoner: You converted them?

Richard Rohr: --starting in the ‘70s, really.

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. So, knowing your personalities, I have to believe that I know you’re going to say it kindly. Your difficulty might be saying it clearly. “Do you know what I’m saying, grandma?” We can’t let the kids hear talk of fire and brimstone. That’s just not--” Of course, then that will take on a fight with you: “You don’t believe in hell,” or something like that. So, say as little as you can, but as clear as you can, not using any electric words, which are going to accuse them. I think you said it, Brie, there will almost necessarily be some hurt feelings, and it’s not your job to make sure that you don’t hurt anybody’s feelings. Jesus never said that, “Thou shalt not hurt other people’s feelings.” That’s what necessary boundaries insist on.

I was watching something on marriage of people who had gone into a separation or even a divorce. And they said, “There comes a point where you have the freedom and the confidence to say to another person, ‘I really do love you, but that doesn’t mean we have to live together.’” Real clear on both, “I really do love you, but that doesn’t mean we have to live together,” just in that kind of starkness. Now, you don’t want to say that to your grandparents, but you have to say something comparable if they’ve really taken it upon themselves to be the catechists of your children and to be invested in the dualistic, or punitive, or exclusionary worldview. If we don’t, Christianity is going to continue that the real message is exclusion.

If this isn’t the law, the line in the sand, what is the line in the sand for the reform of Christianity? And it might even cause a temporary separation, hopefully not a permanent one.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And this brings us to not just within intergenerational family conversations and dynamics, but we’ve got a few questions here within partnership and marriage about having different perspectives on this. So, this question comes from Daniel in Michigan:

Unfortunately, my bride, an Enneagram One is threatened by the podcasts and the book. Recently, she told me, ‘Everything I fundamentally need to know about God, I learned when I was six years old.’ My wife goes to Bible studies, loves church, sings in the worship band, is a devoted Christian, and always seeks to please God, but her inflexible, absolute personality simply cannot let her hear anything different than the things she learned when she was six. When I talked to our son, who is seventeen years old, about the podcasts, and the book, and Richard Rohr, it’s an offense to her. She says I’m disrespecting her when I talk to her son about the ideas of the Universal Christ. Is there any hope of sharing these ideas from the podcasts with my beautiful, dogmatic, perfectionist bride of twenty-seven years?

Richard Rohr: That is real, isn’t it? My goodness. You can see how he loves her and respects her, and since I’m an Enneagram One, I guess I can speak to it. The Enneagram One creates their identity by their rightness, and it feels like she’s created a pretty strong boundary around that. She can’t possibly mean that her little six-year-old mind could have known everything about God. She’s pulled God into a very small frame. Now, I know he can’t say that to her. Maybe he can? Maybe he can? But she’s afraid of ambiguity. It sounds like very little tolerance for ambiguity and a fear of being wrong. It sounds like I’m correcting her. I guess I feel that freedom because I know how we Ones need correction, but we don’t take it very well because we’re so identified in being right. Wow.

Brie Stoner: It’s interesting because Gina brought up a similar question about being on a different page than her partner and that he even considers her lost.

Richard Rohr: Lost.

Brie Stoner: Similar to Daniel’s question, she says:

I’m starting to feel concerned for our marriage. Can you offer any advice for how

we may be able to come to some sort of respectful and peaceful understanding when your partner thinks that these ideas will destroy our family?

So, I think this seems to be a theme that's coming up in questions about partnership, which is, "What do we do when one of us is ready to embrace these ideas and our partner is not? How do we find a respectful way to coexist and continue in our partnerships?"

Richard Rohr: You know, I've said to the students in the Living School, the gospel doesn't solve your problem, it creates new problems for you. But we're not used to thinking of the gospel that way. And even Paul must have been facing this. We call it in the Catholic Church, the "Pauline privilege" where he says very directly—if this is authentic Paul, I'm not sure, but it doesn't matter. It's in there—"You cannot yoke a believer with an unbeliever." That's pretty dualistic, isn't it? But he must have seen the inability for two people with completely different worldviews, especially in the spiritual realm, to persist in partnership. I would say the same thing that I'd say about war, you have to take every possible means to resolve the conflict before you take violent means, which I guess in this case would mean separation or divorce. But it is interesting to me that Paul makes allowance for that, "You cannot yoke a believe with an unbeliever." Wow.

So, certainly love is primary. Certainly forgiveness is primary. But when she so closes him down, in the first story, that he can't talk to his son about his belief, that's not so good. Apparently she's allowed to talk about her belief. I don't know. But do you see how it sets up almost total conflicts? So, do we both shut up and not talk to our son? And then Gina's same, but even harder concern, that he's saying she's lost. Again, you see the immense limitations of rigid cognitive thinking, all-or-nothing thinking, dualistic thinking. I'm sometimes fearing in my later years, I'm becoming a one-trick pony, that again and again, my response to things is, "That's the dualistic mind. That's, again, the dualistic mind." I see it in single-issue voting, is a dualistic mind. I see this when one partner in a marriage is totally dualistic, even considering their partner lost, because you can't be as rigid as I am, so there's no ability to include and therefore there's no ability to transcend. Now, we'd also have to say, it's not your responsibility to change that person.

Brie Stoner: That's important, I think.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Oh, that must be hard to let go of. But to state your own belief, your own needs, "I need this much. Can you give me this much?" If the partner cannot meet, what I would hope are basic needs, then one does have to talk about new boundaries. Maybe our word for that was separation.

Brie Stoner: I think we've seen this so much at the center, at our conferences, and our Living School students—

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Brie Stoner: --where you see that many of the students who come, or conference attendees, are one of an

equation of partnership. So, it's one member who is passionate about this, interested in it, and maybe not there with their partner.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: And I think in the best case scenario, or at least the best worst-case scenario that that represents, that I've heard from so many people is, if there can at least be a base understanding that we trust each other enough to be exploring the things that are life giving to us and that there's some sense of mutuality in that trust, like, "I'm fine if you want to be more conservative and traditional about these things. Can you also be fine with my need to explore concepts that are different than yours?" But that is so difficult in a culture that has equated marriage with collapsing into each other and believing all the same things, being on the same page, and the idea that there's something wrong if you guys aren't on the same page about everything.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. There's so much truth in what you just said, and I think why it's fun to celebrate just the word, the way partnership has kind of become a new way of approaching a relationship, because then it's not the old romanticized version of like, "You complete me," where you are whole in yourself and you're partnering with someone on a relationship journey that has; I mean, it's exploring frontiers and sometimes one of you will be taking the lead, other times, the other person will be taking the lead. And the richness is in that conversation of—

Richard Rohr: Beautiful.

Paul Swanson: --allowing that difference to thrive in a way so that you can learn from one another. And I feel like what you're saying is, how do we help create the conditions for that so that one person who's going on this path of resonating with the Universal Christ and seeing the cosmos in this way, how does that become okay for the partner who doesn't see that?

Brie Stoner: Well, it gets at what you were saying, Richard, earlier in the previous podcasts about our need for security, separation, control. I mean, you think about how we think about love, there's so much control wrapped up in that, like so much about—

Richard Rohr: So much.

Brie Stoner: --what we have popularized as love and marriage, which is just about sameness, comfort, let's stay in our routine, don't do anything that surprises me, or heaven forbid, is a mystery to me. Don't grow.

Richard Rohr: That's what the first one was talking about. One who says, "Don't grow." Or saying, "I don't have to grow." But you can see why this mindset resisted any notion of evolution, because their worldview is not a growth-change worldview, even though those are Jesus's very first words, "change and believe the Good News." You two are talking about it so much better than I can because you've lived it on a heart level. I'll come back with a simple philosophical statement—the difference between unity and uniformity—and they're almost always confused with people in the early stages of life. They think unity is uniformity. Actually, spiritual unity is diversity maintained and protected by love, just as in the Trinity—diversity, not sameness protected, "I love you enough to let you do it a little differently than me." And now we have a word for that.

Richard Rohr: People who can't do that, we call them "codependent," and we all know codependent marriages. What you see happens is that one or both of them stop growing after a while. One has to surrender themselves to the other person's dictates, worldviews, and the irony is that worldview is usually rather small. They both lose because the person with a larger worldview would never ask their partner to stop growing. But that's what some partners do. They're saying, "Be codependent upon me." That's one of the better psychological words that's come out. Whereas what we know as a mature marriage, and you two represent it, is much more interdependent, where there's a self here, there's a self here, and it's two equals learning to give and take. That's love. Two individuals learning to give and take.

Paul Swanson: I think, too, the importance of having models of relationships who can share that with younger folks. That was one of my big fears before I got married was, "Am I going to be an impediment to Laura's own growth?" And I think being able to have those conversations with folks who have been together for a long stretch of the road and you see them still vibrant, and vivacious, and curious about life and in the wonder, it sparks that like this is possible. And I think there's also just the example of so many kind of collapsed, flattened relationships where you feel like, "What am I doing? How is this a path of transformation, and how do we help one another out of those ruts?"

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I'd like to pivot a little bit and talk about the fear that I sense under these two questions. When we picked two of these, it was hard to narrow it down. There were many, many others that were in a similar vein, which is, the ways that we've conflated a "successful marriage" with being good Christians, because I kind of represent the failure pattern here. I got married very young; very, very young, and I've been working hard in the last several years on a path of learning to forgive myself for the fact that I did choose to separate and to end my marriage, which was a very painful decision and not one that I'm condoning or promoting, but is one that I remember as I was going through the discernment process of that, and I was in the Living School, and I remember I went to Jim Finley crying, and I was like, "Tell me to stay in my marriage. Tell me that all I have to do is just stay in the marriage, that, that's what God wants me to do no matter what, and I'll just give my suffering to Jesus."

Richard Rohr: "I'll grit my teeth and bear it."

Brie Stoner: Yes. Right. I was like, "I'll just turn it into my monastery and I'll just deal with it, and I'll figure it out, but tell me that, that's the right thing to do." And he wouldn't do it. He wouldn't do it. He'll say, "Maybe that's something you could do and maybe that path will open up new connections with your husband. Maybe you'll find new roads. Maybe you'll foster a new relationality, or maybe God is waiting for you on the other side of this choice to believe that God wants what you want at the core of who you are and that God isn't judging you for that."

Brie Stoner: It blew my mind, because I realized that many of us who've grown up as Christians, especially women, I think in particular, have internalized the idea of divorce as an ultimate failure. So, I wonder if you have a word for-- I'm not saying that the people who are asking these questions need to or should even be thinking about that. More that I know that for many of us who have made that choice, there is a little bit of a conflation between being a good Christian woman is you stick it out no matter what.

Richard Rohr: Much of this proceeds from a fundamental, in my opinion, misperception. And that is that we come to God by doing it right, and you lay this all on the whole institution of marriage. Wow. When the doctrine of the cross is the inclusion of imperfection, which, in fact, is saying, “No, the big thing that brings you to God is your mistakes,” you see? So, we have to go that deep with this whole thing. Not that the point is to justify separation and divorce, but that we are so absolutely anemic to the possibility of a failed relationship. The underlying lie is that we can’t integrate failure.

Brie Stoner: That’s it. That’s it.

Richard Rohr: And we should have been the experts at it. All things being equal, I’d love it if every marriage would be eternally successful. I can say it now because all my aunts, and uncles, and parents are dead—huge families on both sides—almost all of them were good Catholic, German, Kansas, farm morality. stuck together till the end. But I have to say very quickly how many of them were happy from my childhood observation? How many of them was the woman free? Very few.

So, okay, they did it right, but in some ways they did it wrong. And thank God I can have this distance now to say that without hurting anybody’s feelings, I hope, because there was no allowance for mistake, for failure, to use the Christian word, for sin. Okay, own the sin and then bring that for healing. We were supposed to be the experts in healing. If we had created a ritual for healing that was equal to the marriage ritual, I think we would’ve had a much better theology of marriage and a lot more healthfully married people.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. What about change? Like, this is the thing that I think is in many ways the institution of marriage got set up in the same ways that our theological view of God is unchanging, which is this idea that, “Okay, you’re going to stay the same forever now, and you’re not going to change. You’re not going to grow, and you’re not going to evolve.” So, it’s almost as though we didn’t make space for the possibility of change. And even now, I don’t know that my marriage was a failure. I’ve learned so much. I am so grateful. I am who I am because of it. And so, almost integrating that as a path is to forgive ourselves for being human beings who change and grow in different ways sometimes. I heard somebody—

Richard Rohr: When I say failure, I mean it was probably a failure in some people’s eyes—

Brie Stoner: Oh, yes. Oh, absolutely.

Richard Rohr: --but you’ve come to the position. I don’t know that it was. That’s good. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Brie Stoner: I don’t know who it is. I Probably should have looked this up, but there’s some marriage psychologist, a famous woman, who said something like, “Everybody in their lives has three marriages. If they’re lucky, it’s to the same person.” I thought that was a—

Richard Rohr: Oh, clever.

Paul Swanson: That’s good.

Brie Stoner: --beautiful way to describe it.

Richard Rohr: “If they’re lucky.” Wow.

Brie Stoner: We go through changes. Sometimes it works to stay together, sometimes it doesn’t.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It’s so funny. I mean, I have not been married terribly long, but just to know that my wife is very different from when we first met.

Richard Rohr: Wow, because she’s kept growing.

Paul Swanson: She’s kept growing. And I love who she was, but my God, who she’s become. It’s frighteningly beautiful because it’s like that endless potential. I can only hope that I’m doing the same.

Richard Rohr: I bet she’s saying the same thing—I hope she is—about you?

Paul Swanson: On a different podcast.

Brie Stoner: Maybe not the “frighteningly beautiful” part. [laughter] Just kidding.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I wonder, Richard, thinking of annulment—and this is, again, coming from an evangelical. My knowledge of annulment is very, very limited—but, like—

Richard Rohr: You didn’t have that in your church.

Paul Swanson: No, we didn’t have that. We just kind of scapegoated, I think. But, is that the point of annulment, that in some ways to recognize like this marriage has come to an end in a ceremonial way?

Richard Rohr: It is a way that we can legitimate it.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I know it was misused. I know it was cheapened. I know it was a juridical fiction, but you just centered in on the one part about it that was very good. We Catholics always found wiggle room, which was an honoring of the human person, believe it or not. “We know the law, but—” We did that in regard to dispensations. We did that in regard to heaven and hell with purgatory. Like John of the Cross said, “Every soul comes to God by a different path.” It was really the honoring of diversity. And I think we did it in a juridical way instead of a healing way. Although, I have had people come to me, very sophisticated people, who said, “I submitted to that annulment process, hours of dialogue, and writing, and sharing, and all, and I have to say it was like therapy.” And here I was dismissive of annulment as a juridical fiction, and I had people who submitted to it and said, “I got to be honest. It was really good.”

So, even bad things, so called, can be very good when mature people submit to them, allow them, go through them. But thank you for seeing it that way. Yeah, annulment was making room for mistake and saying, “Let’s bless mistake,” so much so that maybe like you just said, Brie, I personally can be freed from any guilt, because now I see in the light of grace and

God, it really wasn't mistake at all.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. And think, too, there's a lot of exciting movement toward—I know this kind of like roll your eyes because I think Gwyneth Paltrow made this famous—but “conscious uncoupling.” This idea that there could be a conscious way to look at one another and say, what you said before, “I love you and that doesn't mean that this is working. I love you and I bless you on your journey. I love you and I think it's time for us to go our separate ways. God, forgive me, I love you, and.” And I think that movement is the desire to recognize maybe in a small way in how we relate to divorce or separation, that the belief that nothing is wasted or lost, and the belief that there can be a way to do this that maybe is less damaging to our children, because I think that's the main fear for many of us who have kids when we're in—

Richard Rohr: I'm sure it is.

Brie Stoner: --that dilemma is the fear of, “Oh, my gosh, I am going to screw up my kids from life.”

Richard Rohr: Ruin my kids, yeah.

Brie Stoner: And just as a note, to say that I feel like I am an ambassador or a representative of a very fortunate case of going through that process with somebody mature enough to where our co-parenting relationship is so robust and healthy—

Richard Rohr: Isn't that great?

Brie Stoner: --that we spend a lot of time on our weekends together. We do trips together. And so, I think that's so hopeful as a symbol of maybe, hopefully, more to come from us to move beyond that dogmatic idea that, somehow we failed, that somehow divorce is the worst, or that it has to be contentious and nasty. Although I know that for many, many people, it really is, and it's excruciating and painful, and is a death and needs to be honored as going through a death.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: There's a reason that both Jesus and Paul were so critical of law, because they are both saying there's a law higher than law, and that's the law of love. But law takes subtlety, and discernment, and timing, and wisdom. So, I can see why at least our church, but most churches in the end, it's just easier to fall back on the either/or nature of law. You married; the issue is settled even though both parties might be dying and this is going to kill the kids too.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Right.

Brie Stoner: Well, moving back into some other conversations about boundaries and relationships, Sheila from Meridanville asks a question about boundaries in ways in which relationships have been violently broken. So, she says:

I want to see Christ in everyone and everything, but part of me cannot get past knowing that true evil does exist. How can we see Christ in everyone and everything without being naïve?

And if I can just frame this in a slightly more personal way—

Richard Rohr: Sure, go ahead.

Brie Stoner: --I think what she's getting at is that many of us have experienced violence at the hands of an individual, assaults of all kinds, abuse of all kinds. So, what is the right frame for us to maintain a sense of boundary that names that those actions were evil while still not scapegoating or denying Christ?

Richard Rohr: As you know, this is one of the reasons we were both drawn to that wonderful line from Caryl Chessman, "Christ in the tomb is still Christ." Now, if we had been taught better about that distinction between image and likeness—image is objective, likeness is subjective personal appropriation of the objective Christ. So, what we're asking you to honor in everybody is the objective Christ image, which doesn't mean you have to like that person, be best friends with that person, but neither may you disrespect, speak evil of, or any of the other things. Your attitude toward them must be that they are objectively Christ. Then I've used that story about Mussolini and Hitler. They were still Christ. I know that is so hard to say if we had suffered personally from them. But, that actually gives you the freedom to say, "But your likeness was not like Christ at all."

There's non-dual thinking again. Maintain the image but also speak truth about the likeness. And the likeness, is in many cases, "What you did was wrong." These court cases that are now based on restorative justice, they have both parties maintaining, or naming, I should say, their own fault, if there is fault on both sides. There usually is. If it's even just maintaining the hurt over a ten-year period, "That's my mistake." Name the fault and then move beyond it. So that maintains the basic dignity of the other party, which is given by God and cannot dare not be disrespected, even though there might be fifty human reasons, "He's a slug. He's lazy. He's an abuser," all true, true, true, true. He has not appropriated the divine image but objectively speaking, he is still a child of God.

Brie Stoner: That is so helpful, and it feels like such an important step to even begin to access forgiveness.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Because if I look at somebody who has perpetrated violence on me, as I have, a very painful example of in my own life, the tendency to want to just write this person off as a non-person.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: It was so strong for several years, and maybe part of my healing is to name, "That was so evil. That was so wrong, what happened." And yet, I'm just now beginning to get to the point in the journey where I can access the broken little boy in that man, the broken little boy who had no mirroring of love to tell him that he was worthy without needing to play games at power that led to the kind of violence that he perpetrated on women in his life. To access that, I have to have that image of Christ. I have to believe in it. And then I can say—

Richard Rohr: Otherwise you're just playing games.

Brie Stoner: That's right. Or I'm trying to forgive with my head, and I can't do that either, because this is so bodily. So, it's like I have to have that sense of, "I can connect with that little boy in there, and that's Christ." And the likeness, the ways that those choices have played out, I can say no to that. I can say that is wrong,—

Richard Rohr: That's right. That's right.

Brie Stoner: --it's evil and is not like Christ at all. So, it gives me a way to actually forgive that feels authentic and real.

Richard Rohr: Yep, couldn't say it better. But we're giving them a wonderful tool by that promise of an objective core, and that I can honor, and I will honor. But that doesn't mean I need to personally, temperamentally like that person or need to go to cocktail parties with them.

Brie Stoner: Or be anywhere near them.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah. That's right. But if it did happen, I could pull up enough energy to be decent and respectful, but that doesn't mean best friends.

Paul Swanson: And now we're going to kind of shift here to some of the emotional boundaries in this question from Johnny, from Pennsylvania:

I'm thinking of me to we and the idea of community, how might a husband live out love, peace, and compassion in a relationship with a wife facing an emotional disorder, that's not only hurting her, but causing emotional pain and trauma to the husband and children in the home? I think of how Jesus kept strong emotional boundaries of some people and even how his act of cleansing the temple was a form of love, peace, and compassion. I'm certainly not desiring to divorce or separate, but at the same time, what's a contemplative-seeking, non-dualistic thinking to do in such a chaotic and destructive environment?

Do you have any thoughts Richard?

Richard Rohr: Well, here's the first thing that comes to mind. The fact that Johnny can say this with such calm clarity, no triggered words in there, tells me he's probably mostly answered the question. This doesn't mean that he's supposed to roll over and play dead, but his response is going to be mature, I can tell that already, whatever he decides to do. Now, he says he's not seeking divorce or separation. An emotional disorder that is not only hurting her but causing pain and trauma-- Now trauma to the children, that's unacceptable. So, if that's really true, and I can only assume it is, he's got to go with her to some kind of objective counselor and let her recognize that this is traumatic, if not for himself, at least for the children. He doesn't mention that, does he, a counselor or anything?

Paul Swanson: No.

Richard Rohr: There needs to be a coach to help him and his wife see what's authentic me and what's

authentic we? I would say a case like this is going to take months and don't be discouraged by that. It could be one of the greatest growth experiences of their life. I wonder if she's willing to do that. If she isn't willing to do that, boy, you've got some praying to do.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Well, it's interesting how we have, again, set up the idea that boundaries are unloving.

Richard Rohr: Yes, well put.

Brie Stoner: Why is it that we fail to see sometimes that the boundaries are what creates the space that's necessary to look deeply at the inner life, or address certain problems, or take time for therapy, or whatever it may be. I think we live in a culture that has so demonized or looked down on anything that's not, "Everything's great!"

Richard Rohr: Yes. Is not Christian.

Brie Stoner: "Life is wonderful." Hey, we all need therapy. We all have to work on our stuff.

Richard Rohr: That's right. That's right.

Brie Stoner: To believe that, somehow, it's a failure to admit the fact that we need help when we need help, I think is part of the problem that's plaguing us right now.

Paul Swanson: I think of the model of Jesus, too, of anytime he was about to be stoned, you could use Jesus metaphorically, he would disappear into the wilderness by himself or even when the crowd would want to crown him King, there are times where he would disappear. And I think of that as—

Brie Stoner: Good emotional boundaries.

Paul Swanson: Good emotional boundaries of, "How do I protect myself from what the world wants to put upon me?"

Richard Rohr: I've never thought of that, Paul. That's very helpful.

Paul Swanson: And that's what I think about my own, like, going-to-therapy practice is, "How do I help protect this, my own sense of connection to myself, the beloved, the divine, in ways so that I don't get lost or enmeshed?"

Brie Stoner: Swallowed up.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, because this world is the relentless in some ways with the unboundaried tack of information and trauma from the world. Sorry, I feel like I'm getting away from Johnny's piece, but just the encouragement, what do those boundaries look like for himself and then for his kids in that space?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. And unless he has good boundaries, sense of self, let's just call it, he's not going to know how to protect his children's sense of boundaries, and that's his job as a father. In fact, if he wants to be sure of hateful conversations years later, "You never protected us from mother," if this is as bad as it sounds—maybe she's a rageaholic. Maybe she's mentally

unstable, emotionally unstable—”Why didn’t you protect us from this one woman’s rage controlling the whole house for fifteen years?” And I know many houses that are that way. One neurotic person is allowed to undo the children, “I wanted them to love me so bad that I didn’t leave, or question it, or--” Are there situations where you as the husband have to say, “I can’t let you speak this way in the presence of our children”?

Paul Swanson: Isn’t that what you’ve said about any institution that’s too big to fail is evil.

Richard Rohr: Ah.

Brie Stoner: And in some ways, what I’m hearing in some of these questions is, “How do I deal with this?” And I get it, I’m not trying to condone the act of moving away or separating. However, I also think we also misinterpret non-duality as not acting or not making mindful action, or not taking a mindful choice or not living—What’s the word I’m looking for?

Paul Swanson: Just being passive.

Brie Stoner: Skillful means.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: So, it’s almost as though, “Well, if I’m a non-dual person, then I should just be able to somehow withstand being in this chaotic, unhealthy environment with my kids.” When in reality, non-duality is what allows us to say the yes/and; like, “Yes, I love you, and we need to work on this. The kids are being impacted. Yes, I love you, and I believe that you want what’s best for them, too, so let’s talk about how we can do this.”

Richard Rohr: For the 100th time, first we have to succeed at good, dualistic clarity. Then, the response is non-dual. But when you start with non-dual mushiness, “Everything is beautiful. Everything goes because I’m a Christian,” you end up with slop. You really do.

Paul Swanson: To use your language, Richard, of “order, disorder, and reorder,” it’s giving unnecessary disorder at the wrong time.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: Nice, Paul.

Richard Rohr: That’s a nice way to say it. Yes.

Brie Stoner: Well, speaking of the confusion about non-duality, choice of action and when to allow and when to step out, we also received a lot of questions about community in terms of relationships with our existing churches, or parishes, and communities. So, Angela from Perth, Australia asks:

Having been a part of a conservative Catholic parish where fire-and-brimstone teaching is still alive, I now find myself firmly in the disorder box, and I’m finding it increasingly difficult to relate to this community. Is this my opportunity to practice non-duality and just accept their ways of thinking without judgment, [There’s that non-dual equating non-action.] or is it time to find another community that I have more in common with?

Richard Rohr: Well, I have to own my own prejudice in this answer. Perth, Australia is the only diocese in the world where the Bishop called me in and told me what I could say and what I could not say.

Paul Swanson: No way.

Richard Rohr: So, I know we're dealing with a culture here that is very black and white, and it's very top down. So, let me just state that and maybe it'll unduly influence my response. A lot of people, not just in Perth, Australia, but all over the world, are recognizing that the form of Christianity they were given, not just in the Catholic church but in any church, is just downright unhealthy. So, what I'd encourage such people to do is to form however God leads them, it might be as small as "Where two or three gathered in my name." And Jesus does say, "There I am in their midst." That as strong a promise of presence as the bread which Catholics would have gathered around. I think we're seeing already now, and we'll continue to see for the immediate future, the formation of many para-church groups, prayer groups, study groups, Bible groups, service groups, mission groups that gather in the spirit of Christ. What did Jesus mean by "Shake the dust from your feet"? If they can't hear the word of love and are invested in the world of fire and brimstone, you don't have to join a dysfunctional family. You don't have to let a dysfunctional family affect your whole family, particularly your children.

So, I know we Catholics were trained to stay in there at all costs, but that's pretty much coming to an end. And especially, to be perfectly honest, as we see how much of the clergy became sick people themselves by submitting to this obedience at all costs, conformity at all costs.

I think, well, I'm going to put it, the game is over. It has produced too many unhealthy people, and Angela might be an example of someone who has to humbly, quietly, not in a righteous way, not in a superior way, but quietly shake the dust from her feet and say, "I've got something to do with my thirty remaining years," or whatever they are.

Thank you for this sequence of questions, because it's the same question as we talk about in divorce. There's mature divorce; there's immature divorce. There's mature leaving the church; there's immature leaving of the church. And our only job is to say how do we do it maturely, which might be a finding of Christ—probably will be—much more than staying in there and being angry every Sunday.

Brie Stoner: Ugh. That rings true for me in my experience that I think probably echoes the experience of so many millennials, the great Exodus of leaving church for those of us who grew up evangelical. I remember the morning when sitting in a Sunday teaching I realized, "I don't want to be here," and the second thought, which came quickly after, "I don't think I have to be." And it was this revelation—

Richard Rohr: What freedom.

Brie Stoner: --of, "Wait a minute. I am still completely connected to God regardless of whether or not I'm sitting in this gray chair in this megachurch." And what I found is exactly what you described, Richard, that for a period in my life, not fitting into an institutional church community has actually been the liberation of experiencing Christ more fully everywhere. I

even think about Sunday mornings with my kids now, which growing up Baptist—if there are Baptists listening, you know what I’m talking about—Sunday morning is not exactly a restful, peaceful, loving time because you’re so stressed out to get out the door on time and to be perfectly dressed, and your parents are barking at you, and you’re running and you’re rushing to church, and then you’re exhausted. All this to say that lately in my practice on Sundays has just been to rest and play with my kids in our PJs, or go for a hike in the woods and oh, my goodness, if that’s not the cathedral of Christ, I don’t know what is.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. What is?

Paul Swanson: And Richard, too, I think you named it as expanding the idea of what church is. It could be two or three gathered in a way that is-- It could be in a tavern, or a pub, or just on a walk. And I think about, I’m still a part of a church community here in Albuquerque, but it is not the end-all be-all for me, because I think part of it is because of teachers like yourself who have helped blast open the Universal Christ in a way where, “How can I participate in Christ when I’m with a couple of friends in deep conversation, or having hard conversations asking ourselves questions that we don’t ask anywhere else? To me, Christ is there, and church is happening. So, I think that’s part of the invitation that I hear you saying too. It doesn’t have to be just within the confines of traditional church like you’re doing with your children as well.

Brie Stoner: Well, I also know that some of our listeners are wanting to figure out, “I do choose to stay, if I do feel like it’s right ,and okay, and healthy for me to stay, how do I integrate these ideas?”

Paul Swanson: Yeah, that’s perfect. And this is a question from Angela from British Columbia:

My minister has told me his job is to save as many people in our town as he can. He has not been even able to open up or explore any books that I’ve resonated with. I can only guess there are a lot of people like me in our church who would so appreciate and value the work, but I don’t want to appear to be undermining our minister. I want to share this new and transforming way of being a Christian. I cannot even remember celebrating Easter so fully, but it seems so at odds to create division over an idea that is so uniting. I do see Christ working in the church and have roots here, so I’m not sure if finding a new church is the best idea for me either. Maybe it is, or maybe God will work through me where I am planted. As I deepen my contemplative faith, and so, value its unity and wholeness, how do I best bring it up within my faith group who may be threatened by these ideas?

Richard Rohr: Well, again, I see humility. I see respect in Angela. So, my suspicion is she’s going to do the right thing. All we can do is help her to trust that respect, to trust that non-cynical response, and see where it leads her. And it could well lead her in a number of different ways. What she’s a part of is what we now call a “closed system.” A closed system creates its own logic, its own vocabulary, and insists you stay with that vocabulary and that set of answers. Then the assumption here is to save as many people in our town as possible, do you see what that’s assuming, that I am a safe person; I am an enlightened person?

Jesus has this rather challenging line. You go out, and you make proselytes of other people, and he says it, I’m quoting Jesus, “You make them twice as fit for hell as you are.” Now,

what was the situation that Jesus must have seen that will make him talk that way? I'm not saying he's twice as fit for hell, but it sounds like he's creating his own world in which he is the center stage. A lot of us clergy are tempted to do that. It's about creating codependency of the people upon my world, my language, where I'm in charge. I don't want to accuse this man of all that. It might not be true, but it certainly could easily go in that direction, or it's a narcissistic, self-affirming, self-validating system. A lot of churches are. And when you've been in that for some years, it's terrifying to leave.

It's like children say, even mothers who burned them with cigarettes, "But she's still my mother." That shows how deep our sense of loyalty is. "I want her love so bad." You'll see codependent people in churches. I don't know if this is the case, but that she says, "I never remember celebrating Easter so fully," you can tell she got some experience of a living presence. So, it makes me think she isn't getting living presence, a live presence, in her present church.

Brie Stoner: I wonder, too, Richard, if it has to do with some of what you talked about in marriage of making room for discord, in other words. I think that unity versus uniformity piece is so big in church communities, because what I'm sensing in her question is that there's probably parish members who would really enjoy a study group, a Bible study group, or a book group, maybe on these topics, on the Universal Christ, but that there would be maybe either her minister or other people who would find that very threatening and very not okay. And I just wonder if sometimes the natural evolution of communities necessitates some of that, necessitates the courage of some people standing up and saying, "You know what? No. We actually really find this life-giving, and it's okay if you don't. It's okay if you feel differently." Sometimes that seems to be the only way forward that's authentic. That's authentic, because otherwise we're just all going to church with each other smiling and be like, "Yeah, everything's great." When deep down it's like, "I'm not growing. Are you growing?"

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And that phrase you used, Richard, a "closed system," there's no room for a yes/and in a closed system.

Richard Rohr: No, there isn't. No. It doesn't grow people up. It stays at that first level that I keep repeating of purity, cleaning up. By cleaning up, it means all agreeing to the same language, the same answers. It never moves to growing up, much less waking up, and hardly ever showing up for service to the larger world. That's a closed system. It isn't interested in the rest of the world, it's, "Keep this group together." And much of the world is still at that level. And if this is any consolation, this is not just true in Christianity, it's true in Judaism, Islam, Buddhism even, Hinduism, where it's, "What we want God for, as we understand God, is to take away my anxiety and keep my group together." And that's a legitimate starting point. Those are legitimate needs, but when that's still your need at the age of forty and fifty, what keeps my group together and what tells me I'm wonderful, you haven't got a transformative religion.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I'm thinking what just sprung to mind was the way that we used to do internships here at the CAC, and there would be a ritual of releasing the interns.

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Paul Swanson: And having gone through the experience, I mean, you couldn't get rid of me. But like having

gone through that experience, it was like a closure to that time for that participation in that community. And I think that releasing, if there was a way that if churches could be mature enough in a way to hold that healthy boundary of “This is who we are. You’re obviously moving in a different direction, but we want to release you and bless you on your way,” it feels like some of that lack of ceremony or ritual, if that was in place, could help us move without being so tethered to a community of origin, or stuck from those roots that were pulling us back instead of allowing us to spring forward.

Richard Rohr: They say all rituals started by the need for communities to legitimate rites of passage. But when there’s no legitimating of rites of passage, there’s no legitimating of growth beyond stage one. And so, the whole community agrees to stay at stage one because we’re a ritually starved society. It’s only, “Keep doing our ritual over and over again.” I mean, I know priests who have remained very immature their whole life by saying mass every day--mass, mass, mass—and it becomes a catatonic repetition.

So, I’m glad you brought up that idea of ritual. When mature communities can say, “You’ve got to go here for a while. You’ve got to experiment with your newly discovered gayness. You’ve got to live for a while with your attraction to the Episcopalian denomination. You’ve got to live for a while as a traveler in Africa,” and we bless those journeys instead of stopping them. This is a differently shaped Christianity, but that it has rituals for sending and blessing, more than just rituals of condemnation, these fire-and-brimstone sermons or shunning practices. Maybe that’s what it more commonly is, just quiet shunning.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson. Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: “Well, she’s now in her second marriage. We won’t smile at her this morning, or we won’t let her come to communion,” which is what some German bishops want now in our church. It’s the clergy, the ministers, taking upon themselves a power that Christ never gave them. He gave them power to forgive, to lose, but they like the power to bind up in things that are not even essential.

[music playing]

Paul Swanson: And that’s it for today’s episode of Another Name for Everything with Richard Rohr. This podcast is produced by the Center for Action and Contemplation thanks to the generosity of our donors.

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